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School Committee Minutes Emergency Meeting 08/07/2008

Approved by the School Committee September 23, 2008

**THE ARLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
EMERGENCY MEETING
THURSDAY, AUGUST 7, 2008
7:30 PM**

Present

School Committee Members:

Chair, Denise Burns, Vice Chair, Joe Curran, Joe Curro, Leba Heigham, Secretary Ronald Spangler, Sue Sheffler and Jeff Thielman.

Absent

Superintendent, Nate Levenson, Assistant Superintendent: Kathleen Bodie, Director of Special Education, Mark Ryder and Chief Financial Officer, Sue Mazzarella

Call to order

Chairwoman Ms. Burns addressed the committee and pointed out that the School Committee Attorney; Mr. Alan Miller had information pertaining to the litigation strategy therefore the Emergency School Committee had to be called.

Ms Burns added that the advice given to her by town counsel was that a vote taken in Executive Session on May 13, 2008, should be re-taken in open session and be reflected in regular School Committee minutes.

Ms. Heigham motioned that the chair read the motion made by Mr. Curran during Executive Session as indicated in the executive session notes and Ms. Sheffler seconded this motion

Vote 7:0

Ms. Burns read the following motion from May 13, 2008 Executive Session notes.

"Mr. Joe Curran motioned to request that transcripts of the arbitration hearings held to date be provided to the School Committee by June 2, date certain, to read through in order that the school Committee can review for potential violations to policy and potential budget impact, Ms. Burns seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ms. Heigham No, Mr. Curro No, Ms. Sheffler No, Mr. Thielman No, Mr. Spangler No, Mr. Curran Yes, Ms. Burns Yes

Vote 2 – 5 Motion fails"

Executive Session

On a motion by Ms. Ms. Sheffler and seconded by Mr. Spangler it was voted to enter into Executive Session at 7:35 pm for the purpose to hear Litigation Strategy.

Roll Call: Ms. Heigham Yes, Mr. Curro Yes, Ms. Sheffler Yes, Mr. Thielman Yes, Mr. Spangler Yes, Mr. Curran Yes, Ms. Burns Yes

Vote 7:0 unanimous

On a motion by Mr. Spangler and seconded by Mr. Curran it was voted and approved to exit out of Executive Session and return to the Regular School Committee meeting at 9:12 pm.

Roll Call: Ms. Heigham Yes, Mr. Curro Yes, Ms. Sheffler Yes, Mr. Thielman Yes, Mr. Spangler Yes, Mr. Curran Yes, Ms. Burns Yes

Vote 7:0 unanimous

All members returned to regular meeting

Ms. Burns offered the committee to take a five-minute break

At 9:20 p.m. Chairwoman Ms. Burns read the Letter of Resignation from the Superintendent of Schools.

"To: The Arlington School Committee

From: Nate Levenson

Date: August 7, 2008

It is with great sadness that I share with you my decision to resign as Superintendent of the Arlington Public Schools, effective immediately. I have enjoyed working with a talented staff and a community that is dedicated to education and I am very proud of what we have been able to accomplish over the last three years. The reading intervention program, support for the social and emotional needs of students, improvements in special education, enhanced English language learning programs, and a true culture of collaboration and teamwork are important achievements that have helped the children of Arlington. It was our thoughtful, out of the box, financial management that made these improvements possible during – and despite -- three years of deep budget cuts.

Despite the many successes, however, these have been very hard years for me personally. The community is divided, and differences of opinion often turned to very public and personal attacks. The intense political climate of last year has been especially difficult.

I'm glad that the community recognizes all of my decisions and actions as Superintendent have always put the needs of children, teaching and learning first. At times these decisions have been unpopular with some, especially my decision to dismiss a principal and teacher for inappropriate conduct. I am confident that the decisions I made were the right ones, supported by solid evidence. But even as I know this to be true, recent developments in the appeals process are showing signs of fueling an already heated divide in the community and complicating and already complicated arbitration. I hope my resignation will help the district begin to heal.

I believe I have been the agent of change I was hired to be. More importantly, these changes have received strong support from parents, teachers and administrators. In the process, however, I have become a lightning rod for many of the growing pains in the community. I appreciate the School Committee's support and by their recent three-year extension of my contract, but for my own personal well-being and for the healing of the town, I think it is time for someone else to continue the important work of leading the Arlington Public Schools from good to great.

I will miss Arlington, but it is time for me to move on."

Ms. Burns cited that she hopes the public understands that a statement will be prepared in the next few days and that all litigation strategy planning discussed during executive session is confidential but noted that a few things have to happen 1. We need a strong experienced leader to lead Arlington, 2. We need to let the superintendent know the procedures of not entering the building and 3. The superintendent's computer must be seized.

On a motion by Ms. Heigham and seconded by Mr. Curran it was voted and approved to accept the Resignation of Superintendent Levenson.

Roll Call: Ms. Heigham Yes, Mr. Curro Yes, Ms. Sheffler Yes, Mr. Thielman Yes, Mr. Spangler Yes, Mr. Curran Yes, Ms. Burns Yes

Vote: 7:0 unanimous

Mr. Thielman motioned that the School Committee appoints Ms. Kathleen Bodie as interim Superintendent

until such time that the School Committee take further action.

Roll Call: Ms. Heigham Yes, Mr. Curro Yes, Ms. Sheffler Yes, Mr. Thielman Yes, Mr. Spangler Yes, Mr. Curran No, Ms. Burns No

Vote 5:2 (Curran and Burns voted No)

Mr. Thielman declined the friendly amendment from Ms. Heigham to add acting superintendent.

The committee members suggested possible candidates and search discussions process.

Ms. Burns indicated she had contacted MASS and MASC as well as former superintendents for guidance and had a candidate with experience to step in for the next few weeks. Mr. Thielman said he and others did not have the benefit of that information but stated he spoke with Ms. Bodie earlier in the day and she articulated to him, when asked, that she would take on the appointment, if so assigned.

Mr. Curro, Ms. Heigham and Ms. Sheffler concur that Ms. Bodie would be the best person to fill this interim assignment. Mr. Curran and Ms. Burns would have preferred to recommend former Superintendent Ms. Kathleen Donovan over Ms. Bodie due to Ms. Donovan's previous public relations experience and critical proven savvy.

Mr. Spangler appreciates all the research and effort Ms. Burns has done for the committee but will support to have Ms. Bodie be interim Superintendent.

Mr. Thielman moved that the chair be directed to attend to any and all housekeeping matters related to the resignation of the Superintendent of Schools with Mr. Spangler seconded and amending the motion to inform all School Committee members on all actions.

Vote 7:0 unanimous

Mr. Spangler motioned to direct chair to set up another meeting (not date certain) to bring in such professional advisors Ms. Burns seems appropriate to help find a new superintendent and Mr. Thielman seconded this motion

Vote 7:0 unanimous

Adjourn

Mr. Spangler motioned to adjourn at 9:45 p.m. and Mr. Thielman seconded the motion.

Vote 7:0 unanimous

Submitted by

Karen Fitzgerald

Arlington School Committee

Administrative Assistant